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ABSTRACT

The central theme of this paper is that, as practitioners, career counselors must both watch things and make things happen in their own lives, and really practice what they preach in order to truly inspire and energize their clients. This paper explores three things: the elements of Working, Learning, Playing, and Giving and the way they fit together in counselors' lives-- using life stories as the material for investigation and for role modeling; some of the practical and creative tools the authors have developed on a joint English/Irish project which has been running for the last two years; and lessons the authors have learned from working across national boundaries. (GCP)

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Creative Career & Life Management

by
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Chapter Sixteen

Creative Career and Life Management

Brian McIvor & Peter Hawkins

Introduction

Each of us on this planet share a number of things - our common humanity, the fact that we are born and some time later (at a time not of our choosing) we die! What happens in between is a matter of prime concern for us. Some people feel that they are in complete control - many feel that they are being brought along by events. It is said that the world can be divided into four types of people: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, those to whom things happen and those who constantly ask "what's going on?". Finding out the career and lifestyle that suits us is a process that is fraught with complexity as we are subject to pressure from those in our families, communities and ethnic group who feel they have may have a say in what we do and how we do it.

The central theme of this paper is that we as practitioners must both watch things and make things happen in our own lives, and really practice what we preach in order to truly inspire and energise our clients.

In this paper we explore three things:

- The elements of Working, Learning, Playing and Giving and the way they fit together in our lives - using our own life stories as the material for investigation and for role-modelling.
- Some of the practical and creative tools we have developed between us on a joint English/Irish project which has been running for the last two years in Ireland and England.
- Lessons we have learned from working across national boundaries.

Background

The disappearance of Boundaries

In career and job-searching a lot of stress is placed on matching the individual to the job and to the job-market. While this has direct relevance to government and in-company programmes it leaves out the other elements of a person's life that provide the personal context for what happens on the job. The organisation sees only the 9-to-5 part of a person's life but they themselves have to manage all components in

as much harmony as possible. It is up to the individual to manage the boundaries in his/her life.

The current complaint from our clients is that they are being asked to work harder for less and there are fewer of their colleagues now than there were five years ago. Charles Handy's paradigm of half the workforce being paid twice as much and producing three times what they did seems to have been taken literally to heart by many employers without properly counting the human cost on those who left their jobs and those who held onto them. The key issue nowadays is that people are being made to feel that they must work long hours without limit to hold on to their jobs. The effects of this on health and general well-being is well-documented in terms of work-related stress, absenteeism and illness.

Work/Life Balance in the 0US and Europe

In Europe, a European Commission directive has dictated that the working week should be no more than 48 hours. In Germany, the principle of giving proper place to work, family and church has had support in larger corporations (Siemens Nixdorf placed a maximum 40 hours per week cap on the work of all grades - including managers). Various surveys of rewards in corporate life in Europe and America contrast the preoccupation with the acquisition of spare time (Europe) with the acquisition of material rewards (United States). This might suggest that the situation is healthier in Europe, but with the expansion of multi-national corporations Europe is becoming as vulnerable as anywhere else.

The Four Components: Working, Learning, Playing and Giving

To help us cope with these modern day challenges and opportunities we, both as practitioners and with our clients, need to take a fresh look at our working, learning, playing and giving.

As so often in life, it can be our frame of mind that makes all the difference. It's the spirit in which we approach our working, learning, playing and giving – not the activity itself – that counts.

If we see work as dull and boring, we can't be surprised if it turns out that way. If we only see weekends as fun and exciting, what do we create with the other five days?

To get more out of life, we may need to approach it in a completely new frame of mind.

	OLD Approach	NEW Approach
WORKING	• Doing what you're given • Rigid job • Real drudgery • Earning a living • Filling time	• Shaping your own role • Unique bundle of projects roles, tasks and skills • Fun, exciting & energising • Making a life • Adding value
LEARNING	• In the classroom • Academic knowledge • Formal qualifications • Intensive study, set route and exam pressure	• Everywhere • New skills & experience • Learning for life • Choice, freedom and flexibility
PLAYING	• What I did as a child • Done in my spare time • Done with my friends	• What I do everyday • Enjoyed everywhere • Embracing everyone
GIVING	• Giving money • Discrete charitable act • Giving to look good	• Giving myself everyday-with family, friends colleagues and the wider community • Giving wisely-using my best talents, skills and knowledge where I know I can make a difference

The central notion here is: how can we generate a life-style where all of these elements are present in their proper proportions and that there is as complete an overlap between them as practical? The element of giving has been taken by us to include relationships, contributions to our community or church or political grouping. Our aim has to be all embracing. If our work is properly integrated with our learning we will develop quickly in the job. If the elements of playing and giving are brought into our workplace the process is one of classic job-enrichment.

This type of holistic approach is vulnerable to manipulation by all-embracing corporate cultures where the expression is "We are not only your colleagues but also your Father and Mother and Brother and Sister!" The thinking that all has to be subordinated to the needs of the organisation needs challenging if the individual and the corporation have to have a collective future. The main difficulty would seem to be that as

organisations become more short-term in their focus - both with regard to their own business and that of their employees the holistic agenda is in danger of being lost altogether.

Integration

One of the dangers our clients experience is in thinking in terms of exclusive choices. For example, a client may say, "You can have a corporate career but that won't leave time for service to your community or your leisure." As helpers we have to challenge that thinking to empower the client to explore ways in which all four components of working, learning, playing and giving can find their correct proportions in peoples' lives. The correct proportions and overlaps are for the clients themselves to determine and they should be very protective of other people trying to limit their choices to a set of binary choices: "You can have one or other but not both." Our question to our clients is, "What is the correct proportion of these in your life and how do they overlap in the home, in the workplace, in your leisure and in your community?" Incidentally, the definition we would have of community would be a wide one to embrace everything from your street to those on the planet who you need to engage with- either as helper or client.

Philosophically, the choice is between the limiting "OR" statement (you can have one or the other) and the enabling "HOW" statement (how will these elements of working, playing, learning and giving combine in your life?). This is the ultimate lonely choice the client has to make.

Disintegration

Where the situation arises that the individual thinks and works in four separate compartments of working, learning, playing and giving the risks are great. In an oppressive organisational culture work will be the dominant element, there will not be enough time for learning (because of cost), play will be an occasional game of golf or football and giving will be a thing of the past. Management and training consultants constantly battle with the challenge of integrating meaningful learning into the organisation. Mechanistic approaches try to quantify human resources into bottom-line figures - with all the contradictions that implies. Reducing all elements of work life to the tangible, the measurable and the cost-effective is to deny that most un-quantifiable entity - the full person at work. People are complex and have complex needs both on and off the job but these needs frequently conflict with a cost-cutting and bottom-line focus. The traditional way for the human resource professional to get agreement to any type of holistic approach has been to point out the enormous cost of

key staff replacement (approximately 150% of annual salary) and to make the issue one of retention of key staff.

The Disappearance of the Job For Life

Another reason for the job-holder to bear these issues in mind is as a result of the effective disappearance of the "job for life." In the USA short-term job contracts are the order of the day. In Europe the norm until recently has been the job for life or the long-term contract. This has changed dramatically in the last 10 years with the focus on controlling costs in government services and in industry. Japan, traditionally the home of the job for life, has seen a sea-change in the disappearance of long-term allegiance of its members of staff and replacement of short-term contracts. Dramatic changes as a result of saturation of organisations with the shorter time frames imposed by technology in the last 10 years has made long-term planning much more difficult.

Outside Work:

Adapting the WLPG principle to other parts of our lives can be extremely profitable as we explore the enrichment of our playing with the addition of learning. Many people will tell you that this happens anyway and that it is a common-place thing. Our contention is that it has not been thought about a lot up to now.

Because of transferability of skills, valuable and work-relevant skills such as leadership may be developed outside work - e.g. in community or in sports and brought into organisations. The Competency model which is being used increasingly in organisations for selection and advancement gives behavioural anchors as to what is required in a supervisor (for example) - but where will that potential supervisor get that experience if, for example, they have been on a call desk dealing with customer queries for all their working lives up to that?

Taking Control of your WLPG – its as easy as planning your vacation

We spend fifty two weeks a year working, learning, playing and giving. Yet most of us put all our efforts into planning just two weeks of concentrated playing – our annual vacation.

Subconsciously we see this as a reward that makes our life better – if only temporarily. What we overlook is our potential to improve our life permanently. Yet we can do this by simply applying the same planning and effort we reserve for our vacations. This involves choosing the life we want to be living every day of the year – not just for a mere fourteen.

The following process highlights the transferability of the skills we use to manage our vacations to managing our life as a whole:

YOUR VACATION	YOUR LIFE	THE WLPG PROCESS
Why do I need vacation?	Why do I need to change my life?	STAGE 1 This is my life
WHAT do I need from a vacation?	WHAT so I need for a happy life?	STAGE 2 I can picture the life I want
WHERE will I find what I need?	WHERE must I go to achieve this?	STAGE 3 I can map out my route
HOW do I start my journey?	HOW do I start this process?	STAGE 4 I'm taking control
WHO will help me get there?	WHO can help me through it?	STAGE 5 I need people who can help me
WHICH holiday do I choose?	WHICH route do I go down?	STAGE 6 I'm on my way...
WHEN do I leave?	WHEN will I make this happen?	STAGE 7 MY WLPG life project

While we all have these skills (virtually any 16 year old can book their dream vacation) they remain latent and unexploited in the rest of our life.

As part of our partnership we have developed this seven stage process, applying the lessons learned from planning our vacation to managing our life.

Stage 1 – helps you discover how you can blend your working, learning, playing and giving to enhance the quality of your life.

Stage 2 – equips you with the self-knowledge to find out what really matters to you and create a picture of your ideal life that will really inspire you.

Stage 3 – enables you to assess how far you are from that ideal life now and plot the various routes that can lead you to it.

Stage 4 – encourages you to get the attitude, belief and commitment that will let you seize the opportunities to blend your WLPG in a way that creates the future you want.

Stage 5 – develops the vital skill of relationship management and helps you create a community of people who will support you on your journey.

Stage 6 – helps you decide whether you could bring your present work to life, make your real life outside work or look for a new job or form of work.

Stage 7 – combines 1-6 to develop a creative but practical six-month project that uses your WLPG to make your ideal life a reality.

Practicing What We Preach

We have been extremely conscious of the fact that the data which participants have to work to also includes data on the facilitators. Therefore the facilitator needs to demonstrate from his/her own experience just where in his/her own life or business he/she has implemented the techniques. It is worth doing a self-inventory of one's own coping techniques in difficult times.

In facilitating WLPG one of the testing questions from participants which you can expect is - "How have you applied this in your own life?" The downside is that you should have your answers ready - but the upside is that you can now programme in playing and giving activities into your personal agenda with a real-life justification.

The critical point here is that as facilitator or trainer you are exhibit number one. However, one of the traps is that people differ in their ideas of what a successfully-balanced life is,, and you have to be prepared. As a practicising practitioner you have to cope with rejection from someone who thinks that driving a two-year old automobile is the first step to skid row. In other peoples' eyes you may be exploiting the world if you are not eliminating world hunger in every spare moment between workshops.

The question we are called to address is a complex one - we have to find a unique set of answers about ourselves in a world that tends to have one-dimensional views of success - particularly in defining it in terms of having and doing, rather than in terms of being.

As a practitioner of your method it is reasonable to expect you to practice it and to show evidence of where you succeeded. However, there are powerful learning points in analysing experience of where you failed! Learning through failure and brokenness is a reality, though a difficult one for some to accept.

Conclusions

The main lessons for us are as follows:

1. To truly energise and inspire our clients we must think and act in new ways as practitioners. We need to reframe our working, learning, playing and giving and inject more fun, learning and sharing into our daily lives.
2. Our role as a community is to help create new ways and liberating ways of things which encourage individuals to look more creatively at their life and work choices - particularly the range of options that the overlaps between working, learning, playing and giving provide.

3. We must not only engage in every exercise we offer our clients, but provide relevant, up-to-date stories and evidence of how we have applied these to enrich our lives.
4. As facilitators we need to be open and honest about our "special needs" as well as our gifts. Its about sharing our personal stories.
5. We need to continually reflect on and respond to clients' feedback. Such a simple lesson, but all too often not applied.
6. Communicating the message is key. Keep it simple, be creative with the use of media and keep it fun and light.
7. Continue to develop a process that's right for you but is also clear to your client. At each stage be prepared to use a flexible range of tools and techniques to enable individuals to take control for themselves.
8. Review your WLPG – are you getting the blend right for yourself.

Related Reading

The Art of Building Windmills	Dr. Peter Hawkins
What Colour is Your Parachute?	Richard Nelson Bolles
The Three Boxes of Life	Richard Nelson Bolles
The Empty Raincoat	Charles Handy
Learning Styles	Honey and Mumford
Working Time Directive European Commission)	Paper No. EC/93/104
Learning Styles (various papers)	Honey and Mumford
Synergogy -A New Strategy for Education	Mouton and Blake

Editor's Note: Due to its excessive length, this paper was shortened by removing a section on developing resources.

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